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The **Nature***Kenya* Newsletter www.naturekenya.org March 2002

NATURALISTS CORNER

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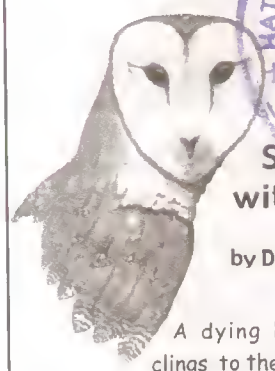


She Sees with Sound

by Dina Mortins

A dying hint of dusk clings to the fragments of the western horizon. The sky obove is o heovy, smothering pall of thick, pregnont cloud. No hint of moonlight, not even the faint twinkle of a long-extinct star. The African night dissolves the periphery of my senses into a monochromatic texture of sooty, all-swallowing blue-black. But even without the slightest hint of light, life is busy thriving oll around me.

As I stumble down the crumbling path, gripping the torch whose beom is my life-line, I am amazed at the complexity and variety of life all around. Evident only from shrill squeaks and promising rustles, innumeroble rodents, frogs ond insects forage diligently amongst the crevassed rocks and clumped grasses. Slugs and earthworms, glistening with slimy mucus, writhe ocross the path. Long-legged, long-feelered ants scurry obout hungrily. A soft shuffle in the tortured tangle of a fig-tree makes me look up.

A pained, indignant look meets my torch beam. It is an African Barn Owl.

continued on page 4

Tiny organisms with a huge importance to biodiversity conservation

TALK BY JOYCE JEFWA

Monday 11 March '02,

5:30 p.m. FORD HALL,

National Museums of Kenya, Nairobi,

Refreshments prior & Town drop off

Fungi ore little understood and often overlooked, but they are the most diverse group of organisms after insects ond provide innumerable services.

The success of plant conservation, monagement of greenhouse goses, promotion of food security, the discovery of new phormaceuticals and other products directly depend on fungi.

An illustroted tolk - not be missed!

LIFE SENSE

Our lives through animal eyes

We will screen the third programme of this BBC production, before the talk on Fungi from 5:00 p.m. at the Ford Hall

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETINGS

Friends of Nairobi Arboretum

Saturday 16 March '02,

11:00 a.m. Shelter Banda

Nairobi Arboretum

Snocks & refreshments to be served

Nature Kenya

Monday 13 May '02,

5:30 p.m. Louis Leakey HALL,

Natianal Museums of Kenya, Nairabi

GREAT NEW BOOK!!

THE NEW GUIDE TO Trees & Shrubs of Eost Africa by Nojmo Dharoni

Will be avoiloble from Noture Kenyo in Morch

A field guide to more than 330 of the trees, shrubs, palms and mangraves - indigenous, and exatic - cammonly faund in the East Africon region.

Softbock. Approx 316 pages
ISBN: 1-86872-640-1
full colour with 760 photogrophs ond illustrations showing eoch species, its fruit, flowers and speciol features.

TRAINING

FUNDAMENTALS OF ORNITHOLOGY

A CERTIFICATE COURSE FOR BIRD GUIDES AND BIRDERS
ELSAMERE FIELD STUDIES CENTRE, LAKE NAIVASHA 23 - 30 APRIL 2002

Fees ond opplications

KSh 23,500/= per person, payable to '**Noture Kenyo**'. Includes seven nights full-board accommodation, transport and all other course materials, fees, equipment, ond teaching expenses.

Applicants must have birdwatching experience, and education up to at leost KCSE level (CV required). **18 ploces** only ond to secure a ploce, opplications must be accompanied by a non-refundable deposit of KSh 11,750. Course fees must be paid in full by 16 April.

Applications should be addressed to: Lawrence Maina, Nature Kenyo or e-moil office@noturekenya.org

CONSERVATION ACTION

SOUTH NANDI FOREST

Nandi Distict, alt. 1,700-1,850 m; major catchment for Nzoia R. & Yala R. & Lake Victoria Basin

Area: 19,502.2 ha; partly plantation, mostly indigenous forest

Vegetation: Tropical rain forest, with less diversity than Kakamega because of rather high altitude. Transitional between lowland forests of Central Africa and montane forests of Kenya highlands.

Birds: A recorded 111 species. Of these 47 are birds that depend on forests for survival. Holds two-thirds (29/43) of the Kenyan species characteristic of the Guinea-Congo Forest biomes.

Other wildlife: low numbers of threatened mammal species: Leopard *Panthera pardus* and Giant Forest Hog *Hylochoerus meinertzhageni*. The Bongo *Tragelaphus euryceros* is reported to occur but there are no confirmed records.

South Nandi is one of the most threatened forests in Kenya. It is a gazetted forest reserve, but is much disturbed and depleted. Substantial parts of S. Nandi have been excised and given out to settlement and clear-felled to create the Nyayo Tea Zone.

Heavy, poorly managed logging has been intensive since the early 1990s. The felling targets valuable timber (*Prunus africana, Olea capensis* and *Ekebergia capensis)* as well as lighter wood like the *Croton megalocarpus & C. macrostachys*. The small endangered bird Turner's Eremomela shows a particular preference for these lighter trees for foraging.

Illegal encroachment has meant the clearing of forest undergrowth, charcoal burning, tree poaching and livestock grazing. Although only 35 ha of S. Nandi were excised last year, the publicity generated has encouraged people to encroach.

Nature Kenya's conservation programme is currently working with a local community group, South Nandi Biodiversity Conservation Group (SONABIC). With the help of a field intern, Nature Kenya is trying to assist this group to become a Site Support Group, able to stimulate the local community to take action for biodiversity conservation. This will be done through education and awareness programmes and the creation of small-scale nature based enterprises like beekeeping, sericulture and on farm forestry.

SONABIC have already drafted a funding proposal to carry out these activities and Nature Kenya, on its part, is looking for potential donors to support this initiative.

Already, good links with other community-based organisations have been created locally, and the Forest Department have kindly provided office space for the Nature Kenya field intern. Nature Kenya will build on these local networks to help conserve this threatened, important biodiversity area.

Reference: Beentje, H. Forests of Kenya, 1990 Proceedings of the Twelfth Plenary Meeting of aetfat, Hamburg 1990 &
Leon Bennun and Peter Njoroge, 1999 Important Bird Areas in Kenya

BirdLife World bird festival WORLD BIRDWATCH 6-7 October 2001

729 Kenyan Total

Bird Species Seen at World Birdwatch '2001
October 6 & 7 2001
Congratulations to the 300 participants for this great total!

The three teams who recorded the highest number of species per Quarter Square Degree:

1ST **Arabuko Sokoke 73%/ 379 birds**
2ND Marich Pass 58%/ 138 birds
3ND Jane Barnley's 50%/ 252 birds

Special thanks to Sarova Hotels for their kind donation of the first prize of two nights for six at Sarova Shaba.

SAROVA HOTELS

60 teams covered over 69 Quarter Square Degrees countrywide, including thirty Important Bird Areas (IBAs). Seven out of the nine Kenyan endemic species were recorded. Participants included school parties, IBA site support groups and tour guides.

Thanks to all who supported this international event.

See you in 2003!

REGULAR ACTIVITIES

BIRD RINGING

Meet at the Museum, Nairobi Botanic Garden, at 7:00 a.m. every Thursday.

SUNDAY BIRDWATCH

Members meet at the National Museum, Nairobi, car park at 9:00 a.m. the third Sunday of every month, **i.e. 17 March**. The members decide where to go. Bring lunch

TREE WALK

Guided Tree Wolks in the Arboretum on the last Monday, i.e. **25 March from 9:30 a.m**. Meet at the FONA offices beside the Girl Guides HQ. *Those who are nat members af FONA ar Nature Kenya pay Ksh 100/- fee on arrival at the gate.*

WEDNESDAY MORNING BIRDWALKS

Bird watching walks at sites in and around Nairobi. Meet at the National Museum car park every Wednesday at 8:45 a.m. Return about 12:30 p.m. *Those wha are nat members can get temparary membership at Ksh 100 per birdwalk, payable an arrival at the car park.*

ARABUKO-SOKOKE (COAST)

The Saturday birdwatch with the Arabuko Sokoke Forest Guides Association is on the first Saturday of each month i.e. **2 March, at 6:30 a.m.** from the Visitor Centre, Gede. Cost 100/- per person.

FFJ Bird Walk (Coast)

Friends of Fort Jesus birdwolks ore held the third Saturday of each month i.e. **16 March, at 4:00 p.m.** from Ratno Square, Nyali

DECLARATION

Nature Kenya daes nat accept any respansibility whatsaever in respect af negligence af any af its staff, valunteers or members arganising the autings/trips ar far any lass, injury, death ar damage ta praperty.

MARCH DIARY

Sat 2	ASF Birdwalks
Mon 11	Talk on Fungi & LifeSense video
Sat 16	FONA AGM FFJ Birdwalk
Sun 17	Sunday Birdwatch
Mon 25	Tree Walk
Thu 28	Trip to Western Kenya
Birdwalks every Wednesday Marning	
Bird ringing every Thursday Marning	

Editor, **Catherine Ngarachu**

Bird Hotline 749957

Please note the records below are unconfirmed

BIRDS FOR BREAKFAST Recently my wife Ann and I were lucky enough to visit Costa Rica to see a member of Nature Kenya, who now lives in the capital San Jose. We visited the Monteverde claud forest, a wonderful waterfalls garden with hummingbird feeders and a botanical garden. We saw two and three-toed sloths, Blue Jeans (poisan) dart frags (2.5 long), Emerald Basilisk (like a large iguana that can run an tap of the water), Collared Peccary (like a large pig), Mexican red-legged tarantula and much mare, plus nearly 180 species of birds, including 15 species af hummingbird.

On our way to luxuriate in some apen air thermal baths near the Arenal valcana (still active and emitting smoke) we stopped for breakfast at Las Lavas Café at La Fortuno near the shores of Lake Arenal. As we ardered our bacon ond eggs we noticed the bird tables in the garden alongside being charged with bananas. Ta our utter delight we were treated ta a dazzling display of Costa Rican bird life as lifer after lifer came into view:

Clay-colored Robin (a drab brown bird, but the natianal bird af Costa Rica, the Resplendent Quetzal having been bagged by Nicarogua), **Red-legged Honeycreeper** (bright blue and black, and what red legs!), **Blue-gray Tanager, Yellow-throated Euphonia, Scarlet-rumped Tanager** (black with a brilliant scarlet rump), **Greyish Saltator, Northern Baltimore Oriole**, (black head and bright arange body), **Palm Tanager, Yellow Warbler, Bronze-tailed Hummingbird, Bananaquit, Great Kiskadee** (a large flycatcher), **Buff-throated Saltator**, and to tap it all off the **Green Honeycreeper** (yellaw decurved beak, black head and green body). And all this as we had breakfost! What a feast!

I did manage to see the **Resplendent Quetzal** (3 of them) on a later trip. What a sight!

By the way - a serious tip far anyane baoking a flight to San Jose, Costa Rica: the destination can very easily be mistaken by your travel company who will route you to San Jose, CALIFORNIA. And I speak from bitter experience! *Chris Hill*

ADVERTISE IN NATURE NET

Reach over *1000* members by advertising in *Nature Net*

Rates for Classifieds: • Up to 25 words 250/- • Up to 50 words 500/- • 1/4 page @ 1750/- • 1/2 page @ 3000/-

NOTICES

JOIN the African section of the Society for Conservation Biology (SCB)

The section aims to be a pan-African conservation network . To join the Africa section you must be a member of the SCB (www.conservationbiology.org) and then you can simply send a message to africo@conservationbiology.org stating your interest.

An email-bosed bulletin on Conservation Biology and Conservation Biology in Practice will be distributed.

CLASSIFIEDS

INDIGENOUS TREES

INDIGENOUS TREES FOR ALL CLIMATIC TYPES AVAILABLE FROM ESTABLISHED NURSERY, 35 MINUTES FROM MUTHAIGA.

OVER 70 SPECIES READY FOR THE LONG RAINS, ALL WELL GROWN IN LARGE POLYPOTS AND READY TO PLANT.

TREES CAN BE DELIVERED TO NAIROBI LANDSCAPE SIZE TREES AND TREE PLANTING SERVICE ALSO AVAILABLE.

CONTACT CAROLE HEMMINGS 0151 47332 EMAIL: hemmings@africaonline.co.ke

Aga Khan Junior Academy performers at the *Wind in the Trees* concert, organised by Friends of Nairobi Arboretum. 14 groups performed for hundreds of vistors.

TRIPS & OUTINGS

TO WESTERN KENY A MOUNTAINS, FOREST AND LAKE

Thursday 28 March - Wednesday 3 April '02

Mt. Elgon, Kakamega Forest, Lake Victoria

Change of Itinerary & cost

Day 1 Thursday 28 March
Nairobi - Mt Elgon

Meet at 7:15 for 7:30 a.m departure from the National Museum carpark. Overnight at KWS Kapkuro Bandas. Depending on numbers we will share bathroom and kitchen facilities, while camping.

Self catering so bring your own food & utensils as well as your own tent ond bedding.

Day 2 Friday 29 March Mt Elgon
Day 3 Saturday 30 March
Kakamega Forest

Marning in the northern part of the forest. Lunch at Isecheno (southern part) Guest Hause and Campsite (also overnight here).

Day 4 Sunday 31 March Kakamega Forest

Day 5 Monday 1 April
Kakamega Forest - Mbita Point

Deport after breakfast for Mbita Point. Afternoon birdwalk and avernight at Lake Victaria Safari Village.

Day 6 Tuesday 2 April Bird Sanctuary, and if possible Ruma National Park

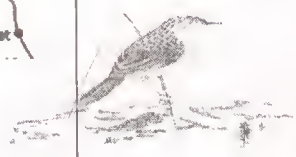
Day 7 Wednesday 3 April Mbita Point - Noirobi

Cost per person: Ksh 12,000/- not inclusive of park fees and transport. Bookings must be accompanied by a non-refundoble deposit of half the trip cost (KSh 6,000/-). Balance must be paid in full by 8 March '02.

REPORTING

SITE SUPPORT GROUP (SSG) MEMBERS ACCOMPLISH SURVEY ON THE SHARPE'S LONGCLAW AND ABERDARE CISTICOLA

Kariuki Ndang'ang'a & Ranald Mulwa



From 15 - 24 September 2001, o rapid survey of the Mau Narok/Molo Grasslands Important Bird Area (IBA) was conducted ta mainly assess the distributian and extent af the remaining grassland habitat and determine populatian densities of two endemic and threatened Kenyan birds: Sharpe's Longclaw and Aberdare Cisticola.

The six-man team included three National Museums Ornithology Dept. staff: Kariuki Ndang'ang'a, Ronald Mulwa Patrick Gichuki and three members of the SSG Friends of Kinangop Plateau (FaKP): James Njarage, Andrew Mwangi and Pius Njoroge.

Preliminary results show that the approximate cover of grasslands is a third, and that of cultivated land is half, af the IBA. Larger and more continuous grasslands were found on the southern-most part of the IBA, which is occupied by the mainly pastoral Maasai community. Sharpe's Langclaw occurred in densities of approximately 1 bird per hectare. Aberdare Cisticola was only seen in 3 of the 40 sample survey plots. Jackson's Widowbird was quite common and readily consoled the team where the ather two lacked. There were over 60 other species recorded on the grasslands.

During the survey the group made contacts with schools and individuals in the area to raise awareness on the conservation of birds and biodiversity in general. This survey was also training far the FoKP members and it was an inspiration to the local people towards farming Site Suppart Graups similar to the FoKP in this area.

This expedition was funded by the African Bird Club (ABC) through Nature Kenya.

Barn Owl story continued

Blinking in the tarch's light, she squints her disappraval at me. I switch off the torch. At first, it seems a hood has been thrown aver my head. Gradually, straining the 100 million add rods in my retinas, I am able to just barely discern the shadows af shapes around me. The owl fluffs her feathers and flexes her wings. She has detected something in the bushes below. With focused cancentratian, she watches and listens. Sounds, far too faint for human hearing, are as clear ta her as if shouted through a micraphane. She silently thrusts herself fram the fig tree inta the darkness below. Her prey, a shrew, now alerted to the threat, flees in a zig-zag scramble. The owl, homing like a heat-seeking missile, follaws every movement the shrew makes. Her flight is noiseless. Aligning her talons in perfect synchrony with the fleeing shrew, she crashes through an apening in the thorny twigs. I hear a deadly crunch. The awl emerges from the bushes and returns, bearing her meal, to the fig tree.

Amazed at her hunting skills, I watch her eat. Her black eyes glower at me from the pearly-white, heart-shaped face. It is this very face, eerily beautiful, that allaws her to hunt so efficiently in utter darkness. The two sculpted fans of fine, filamentaus feathers capture, channel and feed saunds directly into the twa depressians formed by the whorl of feathers beneath the owl's eyes, alongside her beak. From these depressions, the focused sound is channelled into ear-holes. The saund waves that were captured by the wide satellite-dish of the owl's face are cancentrated and therefore amplified.

The owl eats in gulps, constantly turning her head—scanning and interpreting sounds. Her head-turning reveals how her sense of hearing is even more finely adapted. She is able to track movement and adjust her own trajectory because each ear is differentially positioned. The right ear is higher, with the whorl tilted to capture sounds from above, while the left ear, with the whorl of feathers tilted downwards, receives saunds from below. Her brain, receiving the twa sets of sound information simultaneously, can create a three-dimensional tracking system that is virtually infallible, literally creating a picture out of saund. Given this high-tech system, nocturnal shrews ond rodents don't stand a chance!